Proposed Roca Honda Mine
Mt. Taylor Ranger District, Cibola National Forest
Environmental Impact Statement

Background

Roca Honda Resources, LLC (Roca Honda) has submitted a Plan of Operations to the Cibola National Forest proposing to develop and conduct underground uranium mining operations on their mining claims on and near Jesus Mesa in the Mount Taylor Ranger District. The proposed mine is located within portions of Sections 9, 10 and 16, Township 13 North, Range 8 West, New Mexico Principal Meridian (see map on backside).

These sections are located in McKinley County, New Mexico approximately three miles northwest of San Mateo and 22 miles northeast of Grants, New Mexico. Sections 9 and 10 are National Forest System lands, which are open to mineral entry under the General Mining Law of 1872. Section 16 is State of New Mexico land, which is not subject to the regulatory jurisdiction of the Forest Service. However, the entire project is subject to regulatory jurisdiction of the State of New Mexico. Roca Honda proposes a mine permit area encompassing all three sections (1,920 acres) and a surface disturbance area of 183 acres within Sections 9, 10 and 16. Additional surface disturbance associated with the mine haul roads is proposed for Sections 11, 17 and 20.

The Cibola National Forest will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to assess the development of a uranium mining operation on the Mount Taylor Ranger District.

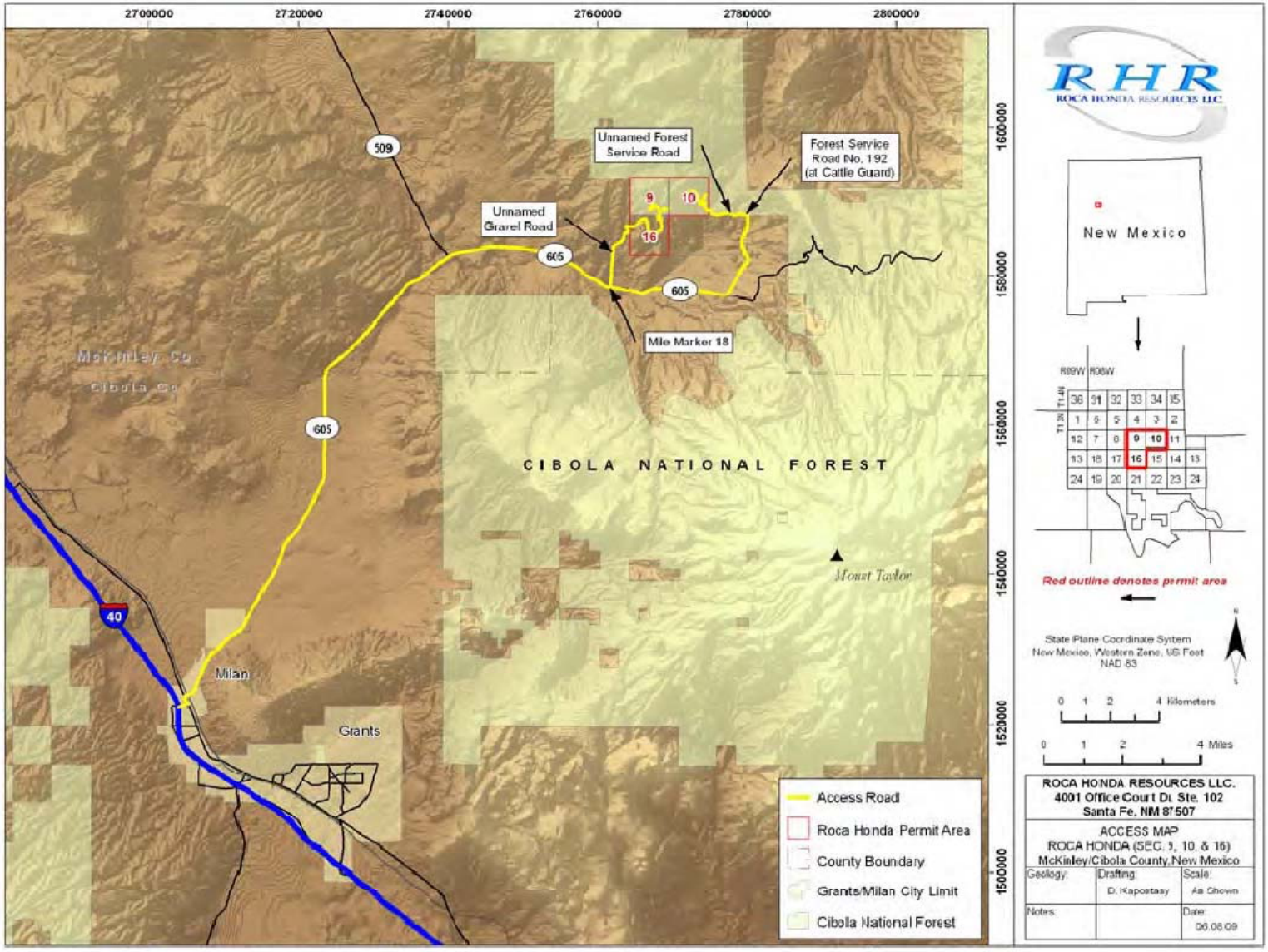
Purpose and Need

The Purpose and Need for this action is to allow Roca Honda to exercise their rights under U.S. mining laws while protecting the environment in accordance with U.S. Forest Service regulations for locatable minerals. The Purpose and Need has two components:

- Roca Honda has a right set forth by the General Mining Law of 1872, as amended, to develop the portion of the proposed Roca Honda mine that is located on Forest System lands.

- The U.S. Forest Service has the responsibility to protect surface resources of National Forest System land to the extent practicable.

Forest Service mining regulations state that “operations shall be conducted so as, where feasible, to minimize adverse impacts on National Forest Surface Resources (36 CFR 228.8).” However, the “authorized officer…must consider economics of the operation along with other factors in determining the reasonableness of requirements for surface resource protection (36 CFR 228.5(a)).”



Proposed Roca Honda Mine Permit Area Location Map

Roca Honda proposes to mine uranium, which is a locatable mineral as established by the General Mining Law of 1872 as amended. Approximately two-thirds of the proposed permit area for the Roca Honda Mine is located on land open to mineral entry, and Roca Honda holds properly located mining claims in that area. Accordingly, Roca Honda holds a statutory right to prospect, explore and develop that portion of the Roca Honda Mine, as long as it complies with Forest Service regulations.

The purpose of the EIS is to evaluate the environmental impacts of the proposed Plan of Operations and determine whether to approve the Plan as proposed or to require additional mitigation measures to protect the environment (in accordance with Forest Service regulations for locatable minerals).

Description of the Proposed Action

Roca Honda proposes to conduct mining operations for a period of approximately 18-19 years, including mine development, operations and reclamation. The proposed mining operations consist of three phases:

1. Mine Development – Mine development includes baseline data gathering, initial site development, construction, and depressurizing activities, which would be conducted to facilitate mine shaft construction. Depressurizing activities include constructing a ring of wells around the perimeter of the area of the productions shafts into the Gallup, Dakota, and Westwater formations. These wells would be installed in advance of shaft construction and pumped in order to relieve the hydrostatic pressure in the formation, thus reducing the amount of water flowing into the shaft excavation as it advances through the formation. Five ventilation shafts, 8-10 feet in diameter, and two concrete-lined production shafts, 18 feet in diameter, would be constructed.

2. Mine Operation – The second phase consists of those activities directly related to production of uranium ore from the underground mine, and transport of the ore offsite for mineral processing. Soils, rock, and ore would be stockpiled on the surface. Up to 4,000 gallons per minute of water would be pumped from the mine and treated prior to discharge in an unnamed tributary of San Mateo Creek. Phase 2 would commence first in Section 16, with initial production planned to start approximately three and a half years after all required permits for the mine are received. At that time, ore production would start in Section 16, and mine development would continue in Sections 9 and 10. The production phase would last approximately 13 years. However, the ultimate mine life may be extended if additional ore is identified or if economic conditions change.

3. Mine Reclamation – The third and final phase includes those activities intended to reclaim land affected by mine development and operation, and to return that land to an approved post-mining land use. Final reclamation is designed to remove surface facilities, plug the mine shafts, re-contour the disturbed area, replace stockpiled soil, and establish vegetation suitable for the post-mining land use of grazing.